

# Making Silhouettes

Photographic silhouettes can be produced in a variety of ways; either naturally through light manipulation or on computer programs like Photoshop.

On Photoshop alone though are a variety of different techniques to produce a silhouette. One of those is by using the Pen Tool.

## First Technique

Using Photoshop's Pen Tool to create silhouettes, as opposed to using something more basic like the Lasso Tool, can have its benefits. First, getting professional quality selections with the Lasso Tool is next to impossible, and silhouettes created with the Lasso Tool generally look sloppy and amateurish. The Pen Tool gives you all the precision you need to create great looking shapes. The second reason for choosing the Pen Tool is that it allows you to create vector-based shapes which are resolution-independent, meaning you can resize them as needed without any loss in image quality.

Creating a silhouette using the Pen Tool is relatively easy, if not time consuming, depending on the complexity of the image you want to silhouette.

### Step 1:

Open the image that you want to create a silhouette from and select the Pen Tool from Photoshop's Tools palette:



### Step 2:

As soon as you select the Pen Tool, the Options Bar at the top of the screen will change to show options specifically for the Pen Tool. To create your silhouette, you want to draw vector-based shapes, so click on the Shape Layers icon in the Options Bar to select it:



### Step 3:

To create a more traditional black-filled silhouette, you'll need our Foreground colour set to black. If your Foreground colour is already set to black, this step can be skipped. If it's not, you can easily

reset the Foreground and Background colours by clicking on the little Black and White squares under the colour swatches near the bottom of your Tool's palette. If you look at your Foreground and Background colour swatches, you'll see that black is now the Foreground colour (the left swatch) and white is now the Background colour (the right swatch):



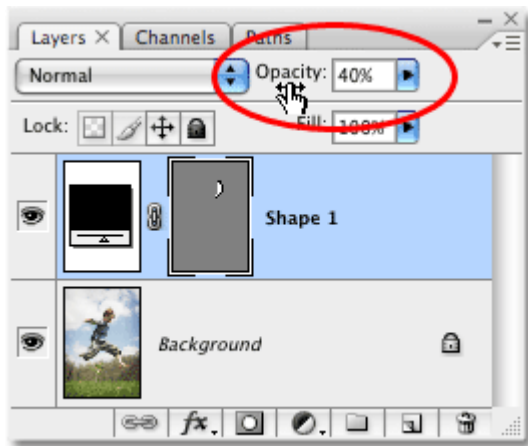
#### **Step 4:**

With the Pen Tool in hand, the Shape Layers option selected in the Options Bar and your Foreground colour set to black, begin drawing an outline around the object in your photo, adding anchor points and moving direction handles as needed. A firm understanding of how to use the Pen Tool is essential for this technique.

As you work your way around the object in your photo you'll notice how the Black fill in follows you as you move. This tends to get in the way of what you are doing; as seen in the example below:



To solve this annoyance, all you need to do is temporarily lower the opacity of your shape layer. If you look in your Layers palette, you can see that you now have a shapes layer. The shape layer needs to be selected; the layer you have selected will be highlighted. With the shapes layer selected go up to the Opacity option in the top right corner of the Layers palette and lower the opacity down to around 40% or less, whatever you are comfortable with:



With the opacity of the shape lowered, you can see through the solid black fill, which makes it much easier to see what you're doing:



Continue drawing your outline around the object with the Pen Tool. When you're done, go back to the Opacity option in the Layers palette and raise the opacity back to 100%. Your completed shape filled with solid black will look something like this:



Your shape can be easily moved to a new document or the background can just as easily be changed to suit your purpose.

## Second Technique

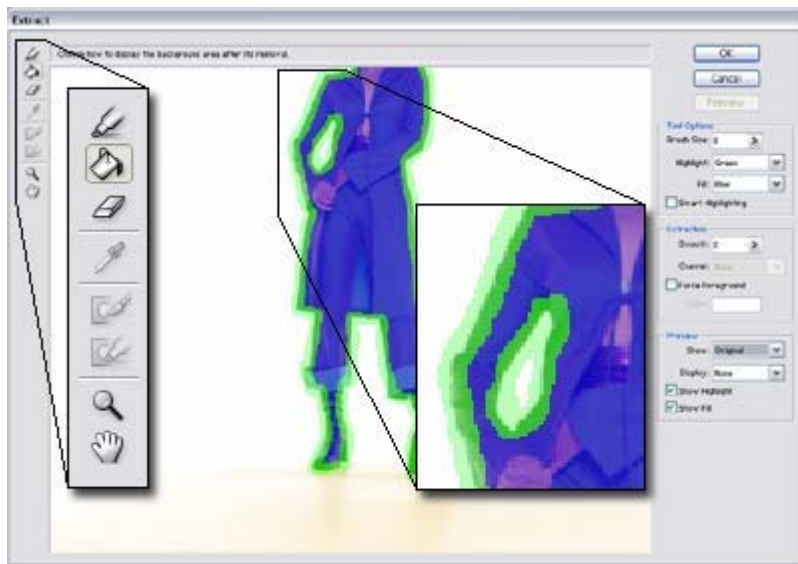
Another technique to create a silhouette in Photoshop requires a strong contrast between the object you want to silhouette and its background.

This technique used Photoshop's Extract filter to trace and cut out an object to make it into a silhouette.

### Step 1:

Find the Extract filter. Go to Filter > Extract. The Extract dialog window will pop open.

Using the brush tool, outline the shape that you want to cut out along the edges. Then fill the shape with the paint bucket to show the areas that you want to keep. When you outline, then fill, you'll be able to click the 'Preview' button to view the extraction. Once you're satisfied click 'OK'.



### Step 2:

To test how well the extraction worked fill the background with a contrasting color. With a close-up, you can see how some of the edges look like there has been a bit of bleeding. In the example below the highlights look like the green of the background is reflecting off the objects edges. If you want a solid shape for a silhouette you can paint the edges back in to appear solid.



To fix the edges of your object choose the History Brush from the tool palette.



Open the History tab and find the last state before the extraction and click in the left column to mark it with the history brush icon.



Go back to your document and, using the History Brush; carefully paint inside the edges to make the slightly green areas around your object look solid. As seen in the example below:



### Step 3:

After add a new layer and fill it with black. Place the new black layer directly above the layer that contains your object. With the black layer highlighted go up to the menu, select > Layer > Create Clipping Mask. This will make your object black completing your silhouette.



## ***Natural Silhouettes***

Silhouettes can appear naturally if the lighting is right. If the object you are taking has a bright background like a sunset and a dark foreground; the object will look naturally silhouetted. Taking natural silhouettes consist of a lot more variables; especially the right timing. The silhouette is generally less defined then if the silhouette was created using a program like Photoshop; yet if taken properly a lot more detail may be visible.

